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HISTORICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL
PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN IN COMBAT

NORA SCOTT KINZER, Ph.D.
U.S. ARMY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
ARLINGTON, VA. 22209

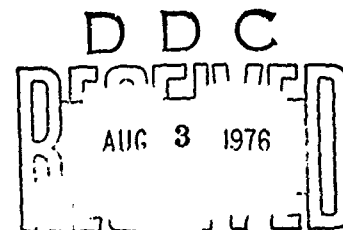
While the question of utilizing women in combat arms jobs or assigning women to combat arms units is currently being discussed (1), there is little research delineating woman's role as combatant. Rather than belabor glorified myths of Amazons or Molly Pitchers, this paper will examine the sparse data on women in combat roles and outline the experience of U.S. Army nurses in combat zones. However, let us begin by examining why the issue of United States Army women in combat units is a topic of concern -- especially since this issue only a few years ago was regarded as little more than fantasy.

The United States Code prohibits Navy women from serving onboard combat vessels or flying aircraft engaged in combat missions (Title 10, Sec. 6015). Also Air Force women are prohibited from flying combat aircraft (Title 10, Sec. 8549). While there are no specific references to women serving in combat in the United States Army, the Department of the Army has adopted a policy of not assigning women to combat units nor allowing women to enter the fields of Armor, Infantry, Field Artillery and Air Defense Artillery. However, there is some pressure on the armed forces to allow women to enter combat arms specialties and combat arms units. There are several reasons for this mounting concern.

First of all, there has been a rapid expansion of women throughout the U.S. Army. In 1972, there were 901 women officers and 11,889 enlisted women, but by February 1976 there were approximately 1,450 women officers and 40,000 enlisted women. Prior to this rapid expansion, the majority of women in the Army were found in the clerical, personnel and administrative fields. Indeed, these were the only fields other than Army Nurse Corps that were open to women. During a period of full employment combined with the conversion to an all

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volunteer Army, fewer men entered the Army and the need arose for persons to fill the various jobs within the Army. Year by year, jobs that previously had been closed to women, such as stevedore or truck mechanic, were opened to women. By July 1975, of the 438 military occupational specialties (MOSSs) in the Army, 403 were open to women and the remaining 35 closed MOSSs are combat arms specialties.

Some women within the Army question the exclusion of women from combat arms specialties or combat units. Some women officers feel that their promotions may be stymied if they (women) have not served in a combat unit. Some enlisted women, in light of current women's liberation ideology, see no sense in the Army's prohibitions. Also in line with demands for equality of opportunity and responsibility, groups outside the Army, such as NOW (National Organization for Women) and even the prestigious DACOWITS group (Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Armed Services), call for the full utilization of women in all specialties -- including combat arms.

In addition, the admission of women to the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point may have an effect on the Army's policy of not allowing women into combat units or combat MOSSs. While the Army contends that it will not commission a woman officer graduate into the four combat arms specialties (Armor, Infantry, Field Artillery and Air Defense Artillery) few differences will be made initially regarding the training of women cadets versus male cadets. That is, female cadets will receive the same kind of instruction in military tactics, use and service of weapons, etc. as male cadets -- until physiological differences dictate a change.

However, USMA's decision is contrary to current Army policy for enlisted women. Prior to July 1, 1975, women were allowed to volunteer for qualification on the M16 rifle. Since eighty-five percent of women at Fts. Jackson and McClellan volunteered for this training, beginning July 1, 1975, "defensive" weapons training was made a mandatory part of WAC basic training. Also, women at the WAC centers receive instruction in rear area protection (camouflage, foxholes, sanitation, etc.). A word about the Army's distinction between "offensive" and "defensive" weapons training is appropriate at this point.

Since women are assigned to combat support (Category II) and combat service support (Category III) units, and since there exists the possibility that members of Category II and III units might have to defend themselves in case of emergency, such as a guerilla attack, women soldiers are given instruction in the use of the M16 rifle. In most cases women are not taught how to use pistols, shotguns, hand-grenades, grenade launchers or machine guns. Supposedly these weapons are only used in offensive maneuvers. Actually, Army policy concerning "offensive" and "defensive" weapons training was predicated on the Army's policy of not allowing women to enter West Point. The Army

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position was based on the fact that USMA graduates were traditionally assigned to combat arms units. If Army women (at the WAC centers or in ROTC courses) were given offensive weapons training, then they might demand entrance to combat arms units and continue to press for entrance to USMA. The situation is now moot because women may enter West Point, are given same weapons training at USMA as male cadets and on graduating even may press to enter combat arms units.

Given the exigencies of modern warfare, there seems to be little logic to support differential male/female weapons training. Even though women are assigned to combat support units, the Vietnam experience (and for that matter World Wars I and II) show that combat support units are subject to attack. Logically, male commanders are reluctant to accept women as members of combat support units, since women soldiers have been inadequately trained to defend their units, engage in patrol duty or counterattack.

The issue of unit effectiveness and the ability -- or rather inability -- of women soldiers to defend their units is of such paramount importance that the Army has decided to change its training. In January 1976, Army Chief of Staff GEN Weyand announced that as soon as possible men and women will be given identical training on the M16. Women ROTC officers as of 1 July 1976 will receive weapons training with men. In October 1976, women's OCS will be moved from Ft. McClellan to Ft. Benning and integrated into male OCS. Thus there is increased probability that women might be able to fill combat arms MOSs and/or to be assigned to combat arms units.

And this prospect is nearly beyond belief. Just as social scientists, journalists and TV commentators worry about woman's changing role, so also is the U.S. Army in a dilemma concerning the utilization of women. Reflecting a growing "militant" attitude -- or at least a non-subservient manner -- women in the Armed Forces are demanding their "rights". When they feel that their complaints are ignored, servicewomen have shown an increased propensity to sue the Department of Defense. Many recent decisions by DoD are the direct outgrowth of these law suits. Even though the Army persists in its policy of not allowing women to enter combat arms jobs or to enter combat arms units, there may be law suits which challenge this directive.

In spite of increasing attention given to the possibility of women in combat (2-4), only one research study (5) peripherally approaches the subject of women as combatants. Savell's paper (5) discusses how 171 respondents (male and female, officer and enlisted) rated twenty-four jobs as "appropriate" or "inappropriate" for women. "Female" jobs, such as social worker, were highly rated as "appropriate" for women. Of the male officer and enlisted personnel 98% felt that social worker was appropriate for a woman as did 99% of women officers and 96% of enlisted women. Interestingly enough, women officers were far more "liberal" in their responses than either the

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males or enlisted females in the sample. For example, 75% of women officers felt that jet pilot was an appropriate job for a woman, while 67% of female enlisted, 55% of male officers and 52% of male enlisted thought so. The occupation ranked least appropriate for women was rifle-carrying infantry foot soldier. Only 23% of male officers, 25% of male enlisted, 33% of female enlisted, and, surprisingly, 49% of women officers ranked rifle-carrying foot soldier as appropriate for a woman.

This male/female split and in particular the extremely liberal views of women officers is reflected in responses given to a question on the Department of the Army's 1974 Quarterly Survey conducted by the Military Personnel Center. The question asked, "Would you feel as secure in combat with a female commander as you would with a male commander provided both have equal qualifications?" Responses indicated that two-thirds of the women (officers and enlisted), only one-third of the male officers and about forty percent of the male enlisted would make no distinction between a male or female commander in a combat situation.

Even though the question of women in combat is emotionally laden with all the bugaboos and myths of several thousand years, women have fought in battle. Opposition to women in combat is usually predicated on the assumption that women are physically unfit and too emotionally unstable to withstand the rigors of combat (6-8).

Historians often ignore or discount women's contribution to warfare. Most intelligence officers are males whose world-view is born of conventional Western European stereotypic sex-role attitudes. If woman's role is defined solely as that of peaceful wife and mother, we can see why journalists, intelligence officers and historians are emotionally and intellectually incapable of reporting on women as fighting troops.

History is in fact replete with the names of female warriors. Boadicea led troops against Roman hordes. Joan of Arc dressed in male clothing and heard voices before her battles. Isabella of Spain had several suits of armor designed to accomodate her various stages of her various pregnancies. General Juana Azurduy de Padilla of Bolivia graciously dressed in a black uniform as a sign of mourning for her comrade-in-arms, husband, and fellow General -- all the while leading her troops in the Andes against the Spaniards in the war of Liberation.

Admittedly, using women as part of an organized army is rare. However, using women as combatants is not. National emergency, pride of country, ideological commitment or revenge provide simplistic enough rationale for women taking up arms. More importantly, utilizing women as active participants in battle or as guerilla-terrorists hinges on the question of how many men are able to fight. Women are used in war only when there are not enough men.

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Focusing on the period 1914-1975, the rest of this paper is divided into three sections: (I) Women as members of organized armies; (II) A resume of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps; and (III) General overview of women as terrorists or guerillas in non-European areas. However, like all classificatory devices this neat division is relatively imprecise.^(a)

I - WOMEN IN COMBAT AS MEMBERS OF ORGANIZED ARMIES

1. Soviet Union. Probably the first instance of using women in modern warfare occurred in Russia in World War I. Kerensky approved the organization of a woman's battalion under Maria Botchkareva. Also there was a woman's guard surrounding the Winter Palace. Due to the lack of weapons, lack of training and general disarray of the Russian Army both these ventures were failures. At the front, the woman's battalion had to flee from male soldiers who vented their hostility against Botchkareva (a Czarist) and the Winter Palace woman's guard broke at the first onslaught (9-10). It is impossible to balance out the ability of these women to fight because of the supply shortages and political bickering of the era.

In World War II, Soviet manpower shortages were so acute that once more women joined the armed forces. Women were used primarily in rear areas in the fields of medicine, communications, air traffic control, air observer and general clerical and administrative. Forty percent of all medical officers at the front were women as were forty-three percent of the field dressing station personnel. Thousands of women trained in first aid and worked in rear area hospitals as volunteers.

As war continued, three women's aviation regiments were formed. The 125th Day Bomber regiment took part in battles in Stalingrad, Byelorussia, the Baltic States and East Prussia. The 586th Air Defence Fighter Interceptor Regiment and the 588th Night Bomber Regiment fought throughout the war (11-12). Air Force Major General Marina Chechneva was credited with 810 night combat missions. Women fought in combat units; a sniper school for women reportedly trained 1,300 girls and women partisans engaged in acts of sabotage behind enemy lines.

But at the end of the war, women were no longer allowed to fill combat arms specialties. The end of the war meant that "normality" had returned and women were sent if not to hearth at least to construction sites, offices and factories. Women today in the Soviet and Warsaw Pact armed forces work as clerks, air traffic controllers and in medical services. Some Soviet Army women are given airborne training but this is limited primarily to members of sports parachutist teams (13). Ludmilla Valentina Tereshkovna's space flight in 1963 did not herald any breakthrough for Soviet women scientist-cosmonauts.

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2. United Kingdom. During World War II, Britain also used a few women in the role of fighting soldiers. The First Aid Nurse Yeomanry Corps (FANY) was an ingenious cover for training French-speaking women as commandos who were parachuted behind German lines in order to engage in espionage and sabotage.

One of the few FANY alumnae to escape capture and execution was Nancy Wake. She worked with the underground in Marseille and was spirited out of France when the Gestapo became aware of her activities. Trained by the British, Nancy Wake parachuted behind the lines in the Auvergne. For nearly two and a half years, she was in charge of some 7,000 Maquis and led her men in commando raids against the Germans (14).

3. France. Within the Free French underground, many women and girls were spies, saboteurs, smugglers of small arms, provocateurs and liason officers (15-16). Although the names of a few heroines appear in documents once in a while, there is little mention of woman's role in the French underground. Several authors underscore the fact that women's role in the French resistance is still largely anonymous and unappreciated (17-19).

German occupation troops did not under-estimate the danger of French, Belgian, Dutch and Central European women underground members. One section of Birkenau was set aside for women prisoners and Ravensbruck concentration camp held a large number of political prisoners.

4. Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia has extensive chronologies and lists of women who participated in the resistance movement (20-22). Even though Yugoslav women worked mainly as support personnel such as doctors, nurses, political commissars, telephone and radio operators, they also participated in battles and guerilla attacks. While many women were awarded decorations for bravery in battle, there is no adequate account concerning women's leadership role in these skirmishes.

5. Israel. Just as Tito's rag-tag followers set the stage for the modern-day Yugoslav Army, so also do we find the beginnings of the Israeli Defense Force in para-military guerilla-terrorist groups. Since the image of an Israeli Sabra woman soldier with machine-gun slung over one shoulder and her chest draped in a bandolier of bullets is so ingrained in popular myth, we shall examine the manner in which women were and are utilized in the Israeli Army. Israeli women and girls were trained and used as members of village defense units and integral parts of the Haganah, Palmach and even the Stern Gang (23-25).

During World War II, three thousand Israeli women joined auxil-

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itary units of the British Army serving in traditional female roles of cooks, nurses, drivers and also mechanics. The British trained thirty-two Palestinian Jewish volunteers, including three women, and these commandos were dropped behind enemy lines for the purposes of espionage and to organize escape routes for European Jews. Two women who were captured, tortured and executed by the Germans have become national heroines of Israel (25).

After World War II, women of the Palmach-Haganah engaged in confrontation with both British and Arabs.

Girl soldiers were essential for convoy duties, since they could conceal hand-weapons under their clothes to get them past the (still gentlemanly) British troops manning the road blocks (24).

Post 1948, women Israeli soldiers engaged in front-line combat and flew reconnaissance missions (26). After 1958 women have only been used as support troops. Selection criteria are higher for women: ninety percent of Israeli males are inducted into the army, while only fifty percent of females are (24).

The decision to de-emphasize Israeli women soldiers' combat role does not seem to have any relationship to their ability or inability to fight, but rather is a response to external pressures of male immigration. Blumberg (27) points out that Kibbutzim have evolved from a nineteen-twenties and thirties equalitarian ideology to a nineteen-fifties sex-defined job structure. She explains that in the mid 1950's a surplus of male immigrant North African Jews had to be rapidly assimilated into Israeli society. What better place than the Kibbutz? Women were sent (or shoved) from tractors and administrative positions back to the laundry and kitchen. Since the Israeli Army also absorbed male immigrants, Blumberg's analysis may also explain why women are now only used for female jobs. Also, a recent newspaper account (28) indicates that former women members of Palmach-Haganah feel that "woman's place" is not at the front-line but rather at home guarding cultural tradition and breeding.

6. China. A major exception to using women solely as secretaries or air traffic controllers seems to be the People's Republic of China, where women are trained as jet fighter pilots (29).

II - UNITED STATES ARMY NURSE CORPS

Even though the World War II and Israeli experiences show that women can fight in battle, opponents of women as combatants usually present arguments that women would not be able to live in mud and filth, or else women would not be able to endure the emotional strain

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of being under fire. The history of the USA Nurse Corps patently refutes these myths.

During World War I, Army nurses in front-line hospitals and mobile evacuation units endured lice, trench-foot, shelling and constant despair. It was difficult to care for wounded when water came sloshing in the muddy hospital floor and lights failed (30). Many nurses were decorated for their service in World War I and also World War II (31).^(b)

In World War II, nurses trained over obstacle courses (32); pitched tents, dug latrines and fired weapons (33). Also, nurses in the Pacific Theatre trained with full battle-packs, climbed up and down nets onboard ships, were dropped into water over their heads, paddled to shore and landed on the beach with whizzing bullets overhead.

The sanguine attitude of nurses on Bataan and Corregidor and their subsequent prisoner of war experiences are well documented (30; 34-36). Juanita Redmond (36) recalled the roar of shells in the Malinta tunnel, scanty rations, scores of wounded, shortages of medicine, headless bodies and finally hurried evacuation.

Sixty-seven American Army nurses left on Corregidor were prisoners of war for two and a half years in the civilian internment camp of Santo Tomas. Amazingly, all sixty-seven worked during their internment and survived.

In the European Theatre, six Army nurses lost their lives when the Germans bombed the beach hospital at Anzio. Officials at Anzio engaged in a strange kind of convoluted logic, as the situation worsened.

When the German drive of February was in full swing, and conditions on the beach were at their worst, the evacuation of nurses was considered but only briefly. As a morale factor their presence was of incalculable value. To remove them would have been very close to an admission of defeat in the eyes of the combat troops. So they remained -- six of them never to depart. Among those who survived, four wore the Silver Star, the first women to ever receive that decoration (37).

Army Nurse Historian files are replete with first-hand accounts of nurses in the European Theatre who slogged through the mud, endured battle-field conditions, were bombed, had hospital tents blow down in high winds, performed minor operations themselves, and even worked with the dead and near-dying in Dachau and Auschwitz.

U.S.A. nurses served in Korea retreating with the first onslaught. As the war progressed, front-line M.A.S.H. nurses were under constant fire. ANC women moved, retreated, evacuated, tore down

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hospital tents, put up tents and stayed with their troops. Living conditions were described as "stench, filth, mud and disease" (30).

Nurses in Viet Nam upheld the tradition of their corps. At Pleiku during the Tet offensive a repeat of the Anzio situation occurred. Initially a decision was made to move the nurses out of Pleiku but to a woman, they volunteered to stay (30).

Army Nurse Corps women display calm demeanor under combat stress conditions. Their example indicates that women do not necessarily have emotional breakdowns when faced with shelling, mud, cold, bombing, fire, death of comrades and ultimately prisoner of war camps.

III - WOMEN GUERILLAS IN NON-EUROPEAN AREAS

However brave nurses may be, they are non-combatants supposedly protected by the Geneva Convention. As we have seen in the case of the Palmach-Haganah, women are drawn into battle usually when there are few, if any, men left to fight. Thus with the proliferation of revolutionary, liberation, Uhuhruh movements throughout the world, manpower resources are stretched. And women are incorporated into the struggle.

1. Cuba and Latin America. Cuban propaganda uses the image of khaki-clad militia-women much as the Israeli's do. Form without substance. However, Jaquette (38) points out that three women took an active part in the Sierra Maestra campaign and one was Castro's second-in-command. But after the revolution, these women were shunted into positions concerned primarily with mobilizing Cuban women for the revolution through the Cuban Federation of Women.

Today, Cuban militia-women train with weapons by day and have make-up and hair-styling classes in the evening. While militia-women cut cane, their main responsibility seems to be as teachers in rural areas (39).

Female participation in student strikes and revolutions is not a new phenomenon in Latin America with Cuba as a lodestar. Since 1945, women students at the University of Buenos Aires have been tortured or jailed for resistance to the Peron regime. Women have joined both far-left and far-right terrorist-guerillas in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela (40). There does not seem to be evidence that women have assumed leadership roles in these guerilla groups.

2. South-East Asia. Similar lacunae exist regarding the actual numbers of women and their fighting ability in South-East Asia. There is no doubt that women did fight in Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia but there is no in-depth outline of whether or not units were sex-segregated, what kind of training women received, whether or not there were women officers, etc. Occasional strident diatribes (41) praise

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all-women units and glorify the "Tiger Lady of Viet Nam," but no hard data appear in either newspapers or intelligence reports.

While an image of screaming hordes of wild-eyed females rushing headlong into battle for home, country and ideology is fascinating, it is indeed unfortunate that we are not able to make definite statements regarding woman's role in liberation movements of South-East Asia. Yes, women did fight. Yes, women were (and are) guerillas. Yes, women were killed. Yes, women succeeded many times in sabotage and espionage. Women are not supposed to engage in battle but women did. However, our lack of data on women guerillas in South-East Asia may reflect the cultural biases of North American intelligence officers and male journalists. For those North Americans who have stereotypical ideas concerning woman's "role", intelligence gathering is limited solely to male involvement and ignores or discounts the possibility of women being used as fighting troops.

Conclusion. But whether Arab or Israeli, Norwegian or Yugoslav, once a truce is signed, women are expected to return to traditional female roles. Yet, as these "traditional female roles" no longer satisfy needs and aspirations of women, demands will be made to keep if not the status, at least the independence that accrues to a fighting soldier.

Nevertheless, there is strong resistance in the United States to using women in combat situations. Repeated surveys indicate that civilians are more opposed to the idea of women in combat than are Army personnel (42). Most studies, however, focus solely on the idea of women fighting as infantry-persons (5). War is not only an infantryman in a foxhole, but a computer technician in a missile base. War is not just men loading a cannon but an officer computing azimuths. Women can kill with as much regret or as little compunction as men.

It may very likely be that not using women as fighting soldiers is a cultural tradition of stable nations. Women are luxuries to be pampered and petted. To admit that women must be used as combat soldiers implies a nation in decadence. But, many American women in the Army, Navy and Air Force do not think so. They want to have the full rights of citizenship -- implying full responsibility. And that means service in combat arms units, onboard fighting ships and flying combat airplanes.

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FOOTNOTES

(a) The major difficulty is trying to define when war is war and not either revolutionary activity or piracy or outright criminal behavior. In spite of attempts to define insurgency movements, revolutionary activities, civil war, etc., there are decidedly grey areas. Definitions depend on which side of the ideological or logistical line one is located. Were Norwegian resistance members part of a civil war or an insurrection? Are members of the P.L.O. criminals or revolutionary heroes? For our purposes, in this paper, the fact that women engage in combat or para-combat activities is sufficient for our analysis. The "legality" of a group or its activities are not a paramount issue.

(b) In World War I, three U.S.A. nurses were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and twenty-four received the Distinguished Service Medal. In addition, twenty-eight nurses were awarded the Croix de Guerre, sixty-nine the British Royal Red Cross and two the British Military Medal. A.N.C. nurses in World War II received decorations including the Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal and the Purple Heart.

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